Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements

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(https://inciteblog.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/makeshift7-med.jpg)
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Some people may have seen this article already, which has been making its rounds on Facebook and the blogosphere, but INCITE! blog editors loved it so much that we wanted to share it here. The piece was originally published in **make/shift** (http://www.makeshiftmag.com/) magazine's Spring/Summer 2010 issue and written by **Courtney Desiree Morris (http://creolemaroon.blogspot.com/)**.

In January 2009, activists in Austin, Texas, learned that one of their own, a white activist named Brandon Darby, had infiltrated groups protesting the Republican National Convention (RNC) as an FBI informant. Darby later admitted to wearing recording devices at planning meetings and during the convention. He testified on behalf of the government in the February 2009 trial of two Texas activists who were arrested at the RNC on charges of making and possessing Molotov cocktails, after Darby encouraged them to do so. The two young men, David McKay and Bradley Crowder, each faced up to fifteen years in prison. Crowder accepted a plea bargain to serve three years in a federal prison; under pressure from federal prosecutors, McKay also pled guilty to being in possession of "unregistered Molotov cocktails" and was sentenced to four years in prison. Information gathered by Darby may also have contributed to the case against the RNC 8, activists from around the country charged with "conspiracy to riot and conspiracy to damage property in the furtherance of terrorism." Austin activists were particularly stunned by the revelation that Darby had served as an informant because he had been a part of various leftist projects and was a leader at Common Ground Relief, a New Orleans–based organization committed to meeting the short-term needs of community members displaced by natural disasters in the Gulf Coast region and dedicated to rebuilding the region and ensuring Katrina evacuees' right to return.

I was surprised but not shocked by this news. I had learned as an undergrad at the University of Texas that the campus police department routinely placed plainclothes police officers in the meetings of radical student groups—you know, just to keep an eye on them. That was in fall 2001. We saw the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, watched a cowboy president wage war on terror, and, in the middle of it all, tried to figure out what we could do to challenge the fascist state transformations taking place before our eyes. At the time, however, it seemed silly that there were cops in our meetings—we weren't the Panthers or the Brown Berets or even some of the rowdier direct-action anti-globalization activists on campus (although we admired them all); we were just young people who didn't believe war was the best response to the 9/11 attacks. But it wasn't silly; the FBI does not dismiss political work. Any organization, be it large or small, can provoke the scrutiny of the state. Perhaps your organization poses a large threat, or maybe you're small now but one day you'll grow up and be too big to rein in. The state usually opts to kill the movement before it grows.

And informants and provocateurs are the state's hired gunmen. Government agencies pick people that no one will notice. Often it's impossible to prove that they're informants because they appear to be completely dedicated to social justice. They establish intimate relationships with activists, becoming friends and lovers, often serving in leadership roles in organizations. A cursory reading of the literature on social movements and organizations in the 1960s and 1970s reveals this fact. The leadership of the American Indian Movement was rife with informants; it is suspected that informants were also largely responsible for the downfall of the Black Panther Party, and the same can be surmised about the antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Not surprisingly, these movements that were toppled by informants and provocateurs were also sites where women and queer activists often experienced intense gender violence, as the autobiographies of activists such as Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown, and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz demonstrate.

Maybe it isn't that informants are difficult to spot but rather that we have collectively ignored the signs that give them away. To save our movements, we need to come to terms with the connections between gender violence, male privilege, and the strategies that informants (and people who just act like them) use to destabilize radical movements. Time and again heterosexual men in radical movements have been allowed to assert their privilege and subordinate others. Despite all that we say to the contrary, the fact is that radical social movements and organizations in the United States have refused to seriously address gender violence [1] as a threat to the survival of our struggles. We've treated misogyny, homophobia, and heterosexism as lesser evils—secondary issues—that will eventually take care of themselves or fade into the background once the "real" issues—racism, the police, class inequality, U.S. wars of aggression—are resolved. There are serious consequences for choosing ignorance. Misogyny and homophobia are central to the reproduction of violence in radical activist communities. Scratch a misogynist and you'll find a homophobe. Scratch a little deeper and you might find the makings of a future informant (or someone who just destabilizes movements like informants do).

The Makings of an Informant: Brandon Darby and Common Ground

On Democracy Now! Malik Rahim, former Black Panther and cofounder of Common Ground in New Orleans, spoke about how devastated he was by Darby's revelation that he was an FBI informant. Several times he stated that his heart had been broken. He especially lamented all of the "young ladies" who left Common Ground as a result of Darby's domineering, aggressive style of organizing. And when those "young ladies" complained? Well, their concerns likely fell on sympathetic but ultimately unresponsive ears—everything may have been true, and after the fact everyone admits how disruptive Darby was, quick to suggest violent, ill-conceived direct-action schemes that endangered everyone he worked with. There were even claims of Darby sexually assaulting female organizers at Common Ground and in general being dismissive of women working in the organization. [2] Darby created conflict in all of the organizations he worked with, yet people were hesitant to hold him accountable because of his history and reputation as an organizer and his "dedication" to "the work." People continued to defend him until he outed himself as an FBI informant. Even Rahim, for all of his guilt and angst, chose to leave Darby in charge of Common Ground although every time there was conflict in the organization it seemed to involve Darby.

Maybe if organizers made collective accountability around gender violence a central part of our practices we could neutralize people who are working on behalf of the state to undermine our struggles. I'm not talking about witch hunts; I'm talking about organizing in such a way that we nip a potential Brandon

Darby in the bud before he can hurt more people. Informants are hard to spot, but my guess is that where there is smoke there is fire, and someone who creates chaos wherever he goes is either an informant or an irresponsible, unaccountable time bomb who can be unintentionally as effective at undermining social-justice organizing as an informant. Ultimately they both do the work of the state and need to be held accountable.

A Brief Historical Reflection on Gender Violence in Radical Movements

Reflecting on the radical organizations and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s provides an important historical context for this discussion. Memoirs by women who were actively involved in these struggles reveal the pervasiveness of tolerance (and in some cases advocacy) of gender violence. Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown, each at different points in their experiences organizing with the Black Panther Party (BPP), cited sexism and the exploitation of women (and their organizing labor) in the BPP as one of their primary reasons for either leaving the group (in the cases of Brown and Shakur) or refusing to ever formally join (in Davis's case). Although women were often expected to make significant personal sacrifices to support the movement, when women found themselves victimized by male comrades there was no support for them or channels to seek redress. Whether it was BPP organizers ignoring the fact that Eldridge Cleaver beat his wife, noted activist Kathleen Cleaver, men coercing women into sex, or just men treating women organizers as subordinated sexual playthings, the BPP and similar organizations tended not to take seriously the corrosive effects of gender violence on liberation struggle. In many ways, Elaine Brown's autobiography, A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story, has gone the furthest in laying bare the ugly realities of misogyny in the movement and the various ways in which both men and women reproduced and reinforced male privilege and gender violence in these organizations. Her experience as the only woman to ever lead the BPP did not exempt her from the brutal misogyny of the organization. She recounts being assaulted by various male comrades (including Huey Newton) as well as being beaten and terrorized by Eldridge Cleaver, who threatened to "bury her in Algeria" during a delegation to China. Her biography demonstrates more explicitly than either Davis's or Shakur's how the masculinist posturing of the BPP (and by extension many radical organizations at the time) created a culture of violence and misogyny that ultimately proved to be the organization's undoing.

These narratives demystify the legacy of gender violence of the very organizations that many of us look up to. They demonstrate how misogyny was normalized in these spaces, dismissed as "personal" or not as important as the more serious struggles against racism or class inequality. Gender violence has historically been deeply entrenched in the political practices of the Left and constituted one of the greatest (if largely unacknowledged) threats to the survival of these organizations. However, if we pay attention to the work of Davis, Shakur, Brown, and others, we can avoid the mistakes of the past and create different kinds of political community.

The Racial Politics of Gender Violence

Race further complicates the ways in which gender violence unfolds in our communities. In "Looking for Common Ground: Relief Work in Post-Katrina New Orleans as an American Parable of Race and Gender Violence," Rachel Luft explores the disturbing pattern of sexual assault against white female volunteers by white male volunteers doing rebuilding work in the Upper Ninth Ward in 2006. She points out how Common Ground failed to address white men's assaults on their co-organizers and instead shifted the blame to the surrounding Black community, warning white women activists that they needed to be careful because New Orleans was a dangerous place. Ultimately it proved easier to criminalize Black men from the neighborhood than to acknowledge that white women and transgender organizers were most likely to be assaulted by white men they worked with. In one case, a white male volunteer was turned over to the police only after he sexually assaulted at least three women in one week. The privilege that white men enjoyed in Common Ground, an organization ostensibly committed to racial justice, meant that they could be violent toward women and queer activists, enact destructive behaviors that undermined the organization's work, and know that the movement would not hold them accountable in the same way that it did Black men in the community where they worked.

Of course, male privilege is not uniform—white men and men of color are unequal participants in and beneficiaries of patriarchy although they both can and do reproduce gender violence. This disparity in the distribution of patriarchy's benefits is not lost on women and queer organizers when we attempt to confront men of color who enact gender violence in our communities. We often worry about reproducing particular kinds of racist violence that disproportionately target men of color. We are understandably loath to call the police, involve the state in any way, or place men of color at the mercy of a historically racist criminal (in)justice system; yet our communities (political and otherwise) often do not step up to demand justice on our behalf. We don't feel comfortable talking to therapists who just reaffirm stereotypes about how fucked-up and exceptionally violent our home communities are. The Left often offers even less support. Our victimization is unfortunate, problematic, but ultimately less important to "the work" than the men of all races who reproduce gender violence in our communities.

Encountering Misogyny on the Left: A Personal Reflection

In the first community group I was actively involved in, I encountered a level of misogyny that I would never have imagined existed in what was supposed to be a radical-people-of-color organization. I was sexually/romantically involved with an older Chicano activist in the group. I was nineteen, an inexperienced young Black activist; he was thirty. He asked me to keep our relationship a secret, and I reluctantly agreed. Later, after he ended the relationship and I was reeling from depression, I discovered that he had been sleeping with at least two other women while we were together. One of them was a friend of mine, another young woman we organized with. Unaware of the nature of our relationship,

which he had failed to disclose to her, she slept with him until he disappeared, refusing to answer her calls or explain the abrupt end of their relationship. She and I, after sharing our experiences, began to trade stories with other women who knew and had organized with this man.

We heard of the women who had left a Chicana/o student group and never came back after his lies and secrets blew up while the group was participating in a Zapatista action in Mexico City. The queer, radical, white organizer who left Austin to get away from his abuse. Another white woman, a social worker who thought they might get married only to come to his apartment one evening and find me there. And then there were the ones that came after me. I always wondered if they knew who he really was. The women he dated were amazing, beautiful, kick-ass, radical women that he used as shields to get himself into places he knew would never be open to such a misogynist. I mean, if that cool woman who worked in Chiapas, spoke Spanish, and worked with undocumented immigrants was dating him, he must be down, right? Wrong.

But his misogyny didn't end there; it was also reflected in his style of organizing. In meetings he always spoke the loudest and longest, using academic jargon that made any discussion excruciatingly more complex than necessary. The academic-speak intimidated people less educated than him because he seemed to know more about radical politics than anyone else. He would talk down to other men in the group, especially those he perceived to be less intelligent than him, which was basically everybody. Then he'd switch gears, apologize for dominating the space, and acknowledge his need to check his male privilege. Ironically, when people did attempt to call him out on his shit, he would feign ignorance—what could they mean, saying that his behavior was masculinist and sexist? He'd complain of being infantilized, refusing to see how he infantilized people all the time. The fact that he was a man of color who could talk a good game about racism and racial-justice struggles masked his abusive behaviors in both radical organizations and his personal relationships. As one of his former partners shared with me, "His radical race analysis allowed people (mostly men but occasionally women as well) to forgive him for being dominating and abusive in his relationships. Womyn had to check their critique of his behavior at the door, lest we lose a man of color in the movement." One of the reasons it is so difficult to hold men of color accountable for reproducing gender violence is that women of color and white activists continue to be invested in the idea that men of color have it harder than anyone else. How do you hold someone accountable when you believe he is target number one for the state?

Unfortunately he wasn't the only man like this I encountered in radical spaces—just one of the smarter ones. Reviewing old e-mails, I am shocked at the number of e-mails from men I organized with that were abusive in tone and content, how easily they would talk down to others for minor mistakes. I am more surprised at my meek, diplomatic responses—like an abuse survivor—as I attempted to placate compañeros who saw nothing wrong with yelling at their partners, friends, and other organizers. There were men like this in various organizations I worked with. The one who called his girlfriend a bitch in front of a group of youth of color during a summer encuentro we were hosting. The one who sexually harassed a queer Chicana couple during a trip to México, trying to pressure them into a threesome. The guys who said they would complete a task, didn't do it, brushed off their compañeras' demands for accountability, let those women take over the task, and when it was finished took all the credit for someone else's hard work. The graduate student who hit his partner—and everyone knew he'd done it, but whenever anyone asked, people would just look ashamed and embarrassed and mumble, "It's complicated." The ones who constantly demeaned queer folks, even people they organized with. Especially the one who thought it would be a revolutionary act to "kill all these faggots, these niggas on the down low, who are fucking up our children, fucking up our homes, fucking up our world, and fucking up our lives!" The one who would shout you down in a meeting or tell you that you couldn't be a feminist because you were too pretty. Or the one who thought homosexuality was a disease from Europe.

Yeah, that guy.

Most of those guys probably weren't informants. Which is a pity because it means they are not getting paid a dime for all the destructive work they do. We might think of these misogynists as inadvertent agents of the state. Regardless of whether they are actually informants or not, the work that they do supports the state's ongoing campaign of terror against social movements and the people who create them. When queer organizers are humiliated and their political struggles sidelined, that is part of an ongoing state project of violence against radicals. When women are knowingly given STIs, physically abused, dismissed in meetings, pushed aside, and forced out of radical organizing spaces while our allies defend known misogynists, organizers collude in the state's efforts to destroy us.

The state has already understood a fact that the Left has struggled to accept: misogynists make great informants. Before or regardless of whether they are ever recruited by the state to disrupt a movement or destabilize an organization, they've likely become well versed in practices of disruptive behavior. They require almost no training and can start the work immediately. What's more paralyzing to our work than when women and/or queer folks leave our movements because they have been repeatedly lied to, humiliated, physically/verbally/emotionally/sexually abused? Or when you have to postpone conversations about the work so that you can devote group meetings to addressing an individual member's most recent offense? Or when that person spreads misinformation, creating confusion and friction among radical groups? Nothing slows down movement building like a misogynist.

What the FBI gets is that when there are people in activist spaces who are committed to taking power and who understand power as domination, our movements will never realize their potential to remake this world. If our energies are absorbed recuperating from the messes that informants (and people who just act

like them) create, we will never be able to focus on the real work of getting free and building the kinds of life-affirming, people-centered communities that we want to live in. To paraphrase bell hooks, where there is a will to dominate there can be no justice, because we will inevitably continue reproducing the same kinds of injustice we claim to be struggling against. It is time for our movements to undergo a radical change from the inside out.

Looking Forward: Creating Gender Justice in our Movements

Radical movements cannot afford the destruction that gender violence creates. If we underestimate the political implications of patriarchal behaviors in our communities, the work will not survive.

Lately I've been turning to the work of queers/feminists of color to think through how to challenge these behaviors in our movements. I've been reading the autobiographies of women who lived through the chaos of social movements debilitated by machismo. I'm revisiting the work of bell hooks, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Gioconda Belli, Margaret Randall, Elaine Brown, Pearl Cleage, Ntozake Shange, and Gloria Anzaldúa to see how other women negotiated gender violence in these spaces and to problematize neat or easy answers about how violence is reproduced in our communities. Newer work by radical feminists of color has also been incredibly helpful, especially the zine Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Partner Abuse in Activist Communities, edited by Ching-In Chen, Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

But there are many resources for confronting this dilemma beyond books. The simple act of speaking and sharing our truths is one of the most powerful tools we have. I've been speaking to my elders, older women of color in struggle who have experienced the things I'm struggling against, and swapping survival stories with other women. In summer 2008 I began doing workshops on ending misogyny and building collective forms of accountability with Cristina Tzintzún, an Austin-based labor organizer and author of the essay "Killing Misogyny: A Personal Story of Love, Violence, and Strategies for Survival." We have also begun the even more liberating practice of naming our experiences publicly and calling on our communities to address what we and so many others have experienced.

Dismantling misogyny cannot be work that only women do. We all must do the work because the survival of our movements depends on it. Until we make radical feminist and queer political ethics that directly challenge heteropatriarchal forms of organizing central to our political practice, radical movements will continue to be devastated by the antics of Brandon Darbys (and folks who aren't informants but just act like them). A queer, radical, feminist ethic of accountability would challenge us to recognize how gender violence is reproduced in our communities, relationships, and organizing practices. Although there are many ways to do this, I want to suggest that there are three key steps that we can take to begin. First, we must support women and queer people in our movements who have experienced interpersonal violence and engage in a collective process of healing. Second, we must initiate a collective dialogue about how we want our communities to look and how to make them safe for everyone. Third, we must develop a model for collective accountability that truly treats the personal as political and helps us to begin practicing justice in our communities. When we allow women/queer organizers to leave activist spaces and protect people whose violence provoked their departure, we are saying we value these de facto state agents who disrupt the work more than we value people whose labor builds and sustains movements.

As angry as gender violence on the Left makes me, I am hopeful. I believe we have the capacity to change and create more justice in our movements. We don't have to start witch hunts to reveal misogynists and informants. They out themselves every time they refuse to apologize, take ownership of their actions, start conflicts and refuse to work them out through consensus, mistreat their compañer@s. We don't have to look for them, but when we are presented with their destructive behaviors we have to hold them accountable. Our strategies don't have to be punitive; people are entitled to their mistakes. But we should expect that people will own those actions and not allow them to become a pattern.

We have a right to be angry when the communities we build that are supposed to be the model for a better, more just world harbor the same kinds of antiqueer, antiwoman, racist violence that pervades society. As radical organizers we must hold each other accountable and not enable misogynists to assert so much power in these spaces. Not allow them to be the faces, voices, and leaders of these movements. Not allow them to rape a compañera and then be on the fucking five o' clock news. In Brandon Darby's case, even if no one suspected he was an informant, his domineering and macho behavior should have been all that was needed to call his leadership into question. By not allowing misogyny to take root in our communities and movements, we not only protect ourselves from the efforts of the state to destroy our work but also create stronger movements that cannot be destroyed from within.

[1] I use the term gender violence to refer to the ways in which homophobia and misogyny are rooted in heteronormative understandings of gender identity and gender roles. Heterosexism not only polices non-normative sexualities but also reproduces normative gender roles and identities that reinforce the logic of patriarchy and male privilege.

[2] I learned this from informal conversations with women who had organized with Darby in Austin and New Orleans while participating in the Austin Informants Working Group, which was formed by people who had worked with Darby and were stunned by his revelation that he was an FBI informant.

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144 thoughts on “Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements”

1. Pingback: Tweets that mention Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements « INCITE! Blog -- Topsy.com
2. EnCee says:

   This article is great. Hands down one of the best critiques I have read in a while.
   I just think it’s so sad that so many great activists had to through this type of stuff.
   Reading about inspiring activists like Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Margaret Randall, Elaine Brown, and Gloria Anzaldúa and knowing they had to go though these types of things just make me wonder what the hell type of movement people are trying to build nowadays. It’s like people have learned nothing from the past.
   I was previously in a Marxist grouping and I think maybe that’s why some people in the the leadership, were always so dismissive of feminism and its critical theory. Under the guise of criticizing bourgeois tendencies they were probably trying to shy away from criticism of the way they run things. It’s easier to dismiss manifestations of chauvinism, patriarchy, hierarchy, machismo and all sorts of related “privilege” when you don’t have a critical theory to analyze it. Then your concerns can just be dismissed or marginalized as not following the proper political line or proletarian/working class mindset.

   It is liberating to speak out against this type of behavior and I don’t think it should be limited to or act as a burden placed on the females in social movements. Men need to call out people on their bullshit too. We need to speak out and expose this type of behavior. It’s not just about checking ourselves and trying build up our own individualistic character. We have to be concerned for building a strong movement that’s based on a solid footing that treats all people with dignity and respect.

   I just wonder how you are supposed to be able to change things? I don’t understand how issues like this can’t be of concern to everyone in a social movement. I work in a domestic violence intervention non-profit and I wonder if that is what makes me so keen to these issues. But, there has to be a way to get people to value these issues in the normal functioning of a group.

A few comments from the repost on truthout really jumped out at me:
Comment from Truthout repost: People do tend to gravitate toward situations and groups they think will let them get away with letting their pathologies play out.

Other comment: The problem, however, is this – they could not so easily disrupt "the work" if that false premise was not already well established. That "the work" was more important than the feelings of one individual.

Further comment: I also think that women working hard in the movements must stand up in meetings and call out this behavior in no uncertain terms and demand redress. If this doesn't work, we should not leave the group, but rather stay and point out at every meeting that the group is allowing someone to be aggressive, dominating, and/or misbehaving. We have got to start having each other's back when a bully is confronted in our organizations.

Another comment: The title seems to get it backwards, though. It's not that misogynists make great informants. It seems more like it's tough to smoke out informants because radical movements have plenty of people around who are not honest about what they claim to represent, esp. their position towards privilege.

other comments: On the other hand, in many nominally anarchist or leftist communities, misogyny and other forms of traditional values runamok, excused by a sacred regard for individual fiat or fear of confrontation. In these kinds of communities, there is no basis for singling out police agents due to their regressive values because the entire community is permeated with these regressive values.
As far as Darby is concerned, it appears to me that, like much of the movement, he had no clear unity on matters of political principle and that self-interest (in the enrichment of his ego, rather than something as obvious as money) was his driving motivation for being in the movement. I think that Darby was in it for the adventure, the feeling of doing something good in a world full of bullshit, and, eventually, to maintain a leadership position in the hierarchy of Common Ground. This isn't enough to sustain most people in the face of government repression, and, indeed, Darby is far from the first person from the anarchist scene to provide information to the police.
REPLY JULY 16, 2010 AT 12:01 AM

- tripcord says:
  While I don't have a problem with the gist of the article, on the matter of Darby, I feel that it does let Malik Rahim and the rest of Common Ground management off too easily for creating a situation where he could rise to such influence. Common Ground higher ups were so inclined to avoid accountablity of their screw-ups, they actively opposed transparency and fostered the very environment conducive to giving power to Brandon Darby. Malik may have mourned the fact that Darby was using his influence inappropriately, but he did nothing effective to rectify it, leading me to believe he himself dismissed the conflicts as trivial. The inner circle of Common Ground, which misleadingly billed itself as a collective for a long while, acted more like a clique of politicians than a group of concerned activists.

  And then there were those who sought to silence Common Grounds critics, on account of them harming the movement, and further stifled discussion and thwarted transparency. By the time problems had snowballed into a mess that could not be contained or ignored, the organization had imploded and destroyed itself, and sent Darby off on a path that would lead to becoming an informant.

  REPLY MAY 24, 2012 AT 1:27 PM

- ⊙▲⊙JediMindTrick⊙▲⊙ (@Magpieluvsyou) says:
  I am very interested in learning more about Common Ground and Malik and whether they are an organization I can trust to work with. Currently I am being contacted by someone from Occupy Wall Street who wants my Occupy The Stage in NOLA to work with Common Ground, but I have an uneasy feeling. I would like to learn more of the history of the environment there. Please contact me on Twitter or at my email @magpieluvsyou or sneakofweasels@gmail.com if that is helpful.

  SEPTEMBER 5, 2012 AT 10:03 PM

3. K. Lovich says:
Thank you for posting/writing this! It means so much to see this analysis put into such a clear articulate form. So healing for me to read.

REPLY JULY 16, 2010 AT 2:09 AM

4. Jan Marie says:
Like water on parched earth! Thank you so much for this article.
As a life long lesbian feminist of color, I can pinpoint the 2 public mass humiliations that drove me out of the early social justice movement. First was the statement given by Stokely Carmichael when ask what position women should play in the moment, he jokingly responded "prone". Second was at a Panther rally in Washington, DC. Huey P. Newton was the speaker. I was already uncomfortable with the ambient level of violence in the men around me, but it was Huey's statement that "we will level the earth to regain our manhood", [which received thunderous applause], that sent me right out the door. Ya just knew that some women in that crowd were going to be marginalized, beaten, raped or other wise "put in their place", by someone intent on regaining his manhood. For me, the struggle had been prioritized and it was clearly a single issue and by my sex I was not included, by my sexuality I was targeted.

Of course that left most of us with either an exclusively white male gay movement or equally exclusive white feminist movement. The former being rife with it's own racism and the latter being oblivious to the class issues that defined the struggles of women of color. At the same time, feminists like Betty Freidan were rabidly homophobic and terrified of any intimation that some of the most ardent feminists were lesbians. For me, it was the courage of Audre Lourde and Flo Kennedy that got me over those rough years. For me it is truly about the triple oppression of being a lesbian woman of color, in a society the was and is racist, sexist and homophobic.

REPLY JULY 16, 2010 AT 5:42 PM

5. Élise Hendrick says:

Thank you for this piece. It was a cathartic read, because a guy just like this – simultaneously charismatic and hateful, and constantly attacking the female and queer members, great at distracting from the shit he'd start by attacking others – was one of the main factors in the downfall of a local civil rights organisation I worked with years ago.

REPLY JULY 16, 2010 AT 10:06 PM

6. Pingback: Why misogynists make great informants | Politics in the Zeros

7. wkh says:

Best article ever. And I bet people all over the world striving for social justice can insert names of misogynists (who may actually be masquerading as women and transfolks too believe it or not) from their activists circles as well. A big hells yeah for finally speaking out and admitting there's a nasty foul odor within as well. And don't let ANYONE tell you that speaking out is not showing solidarity! Being chastised for speaking out is NOT solidarity, it's DYSFUNCTION.

REPLY JULY 17, 2010 AT 10:14 PM

8. Gilbert James says:

Thank you for this. I promise to strive to live my life with humility and eradicate heteropartriarchal forms from my being. My heart grieves for the oppression and violence my sisters, transgenders, queers, and men have experienced. I wish you love and respect.

REPLY JULY 17, 2010 AT 10:21 PM

- Gilbert James says:

  … in afterthought, rather than men, I wish I had said, "and brothers."

  REPLY JULY 17, 2010 AT 10:23 PM

  - n8chz says:

    I wish you had said "transgender people" instead of "transgenders," but I know your heart is in the right place. I don't want to come across as some kind of language police, but you seem to be the type who would want to know.

    JANUARY 10, 2018 AT 7:25 AM

9. Rosa Clemente, 2008 Green Party VP Candidate says:

Fantastic Article!!

REPLY JULY 18, 2010 AT 6:07 AM

10. Pingback: REPOST of a REPOST of a REPOST: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants « NO BOSSES, NO BOYFRIENDS

11. Marc Hudson says:

Insightful stuff, and uncomfortable reading. Will circulate.

REPLY JULY 18, 2010 AT 11:10 PM

12. Alison Park says:

I am so grateful to have read this article. I am always stunned and hurt by the way articulated and unarticulated gender violence thrive and co-exist in movement spaces. Issues around violence against women (rape, domestic violence, stalking, media violence, etc.), transphobia and the right to abortion and other "women's" issues, including division of labor and childcare issues in movements, have to stop being marginalize, de-prioritized and silenced. Thank you so much for this well-written, hope-creating article Courtney (and whoever from INCITE posted this).

REPLY JULY 19, 2010 AT 2:00 PM

13. Liberal Realist says:

I have to say, I thought the article was full of supposition and unsubstantiated claims.

REPLY JULY 19, 2010 AT 11:29 PM

14. Ocahm's Razor says:

This is factually nonsense. Darby wasn't always a mole. He turned into one because of the frequent conflicts he had with people who were dogmatic in the leftist movements. He couldn't distinguish between the worth of this lofty goals and the fact that idiots often may agree with such lofty goals- but that doesn't mean the goals themselves are bad just because some in-your-face lesbians or uber-PC whiner nips at your heels about everything. He let his emotional response to the most annoying fanatics undermine his faith in the goals. And that's when he turned.

REPLY JULY 20, 2010 AT 2:13 AM

- tghi says:

Pretty impressive, the all-consuming power of "in-your-face lesbians" to "turn" men accused of sexual assault into government informants. Now I guess we all know who to hold accountable for Darby's choices! … Oh wait.

REPLY JULY 20, 2010 AT 4:56 AM

- inciteblog says:

In response to Ocahm's Razor's comment, we'd like to remind everyone of our comment policy. If this type of commenting behavior continues, we will delete the comment in order to maintain a respectful and thoughtful space for rich and productive dialogue.

REPLY JULY 21, 2010 AT 2:31 PM

- Charcuterian says:

Booo.
hisss.

REPLY JULY 29, 2010 AT 7:59 PM

- arwyn says:

I'm not sure when you worked with darby, but when i worked with him he was self-centered, sexist, anti-consensus and manipulative. While he was informing on me to the FBI, he accused 3 of my friends of being snitches. He made his choice, to benefit himself and fuck other people over, "in-your-face lesbians" and "uber-PC whiners" didn't make up his mind for him. And even if he was pushed away from radical politics by dogmatic thinking, it only further proves that he had nothing truly invested in radical change or anti-authoritarian politics.
Also, the loftiest goals i know of him having were sleeping with girls 10 years younger than him and being seen "rescuing people".

REPLY SEPTEMBER 1, 2010 AT 11:22 AM

- Kate P. (@Amadaun6) says:

I was going to say, what kind of "lofty goals" are we talking about here? (thanks for your input @arwyn)
Besides, it seems to me that one of the main points in Morris' article is that the harms done by active informants and those who perpetuate misogyny/gender violence aren't all that different. When and why Darby added 'informant' to his list of undesirable traits has little relevance.

DECEMBER 29, 2011 AT 10:42 PM

15. The Voracious Vegan says:

Tremendous, thank you for this. I have been thinking/feeling many of these things lately and am thrilled to see them written in such a powerful, eloquent piece. I already expect sexism and misogyny in the world at large, but to find it in activist/social justice circles is even more disheartening. This post is brilliant, thank you.

REPLY JULY 20, 2010 AT 5:13 AM

16. Pingback: Dhamma As Misogyny Healer, Informant Repellent « Kloncke
17. Amory says:

THANK YOU for sharing this! You have no idea how wonderful it was to read.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Other resources I've found super useful in organizing around community accountability & alternatives to policing regarding SA & DV in radical communities include Generation Five's document on Transformative Justice, the Philly's Pissed web site's links section (phillyspissed.net), and the Philly Stands Up blog.

Thank you again, soooo so much for sharing this.

REPLY JULY 21, 2010 AT 1:39 PM

18. Pingback: Some thoughts on Al Gore and misogynistic "progressive" leadership « Planning the Day
19. Papo Z. says:

This is an outstanding analysis of the unfortunate and enduring realities that debilitate social justice movements. The work is hard enough as a it is when misogyny is not *as* prevalent. Thank you for reminding me of my responsibility to my companer@s, myself and the broader movements we struggle through.
As for Ocahn's Razor's comment, while discomfiting, it is crucial that such posts remain part of the dialogue. Sadly, the homophobic language and unnecessarily aggressive tone exemplify the key points in the article, providing further evidence of the work that needs to be done.

REPLY JULY 22, 2010 AT 8:21 AM

20. AG says:

Great article, thanks for writing and giving me much to reflect upon.

REPLY JULY 22, 2010 AT 2:13 PM

21. Pingback: Intersectionality 'Round the Interwebs, No. 23: lolz the douche away. » V for Vegan: easyVegan.info
22. Ruth Michaelis says:

Thank you , what an inspired article. I had been aware of bits and pieces of these stories . They were woven together into a wonderful and insightful article.

REPLY JULY 22, 2010 AT 8:13 PM

23. Caeli says:

Awesome, awesome awesome article. So well written and useful. Thank you so much for this. As a feminist woman who very definitely left movements or groups for these reasons that you explain that are a for real pattern – I really love this analysis that connects negative and harmful people with the downfall of leftist groups, actions, or movements, and I think the analogy to disruptive state agents works really well. I especially like your 'ways forward' section – really nice to see positivity with analysis and some thoughts on what to do. I'm definitely going to take this in and think about what I can do.

REPLY JULY 24, 2010 AT 3:50 PM

24. Pingback: How Kyriarchy Infects Good Movements
25. Pingback: Looking at 'Why Misogynists Make Great Informants' | Racialicious - the intersection of race and pop culture
26. Liz says:

Damn, you have just written a FIERCE article. I'm proud of you … proud of us for speaking out.

REPLY JULY 27, 2010 AT 11:10 AM

27. Alex Cachinero-Gorman says:

Amazing. I am going to start bringing this to foundational meetings of any group I become a part of and encourage a round-robin reading of the text.

Thank you.
~Alex

REPLY JULY 28, 2010 AT 12:18 PM

28. Drew Hendricks says:

This article had a great deal of recommendation coming from people I work with and respect, but was disappointing for several reasons. For one, it is mis-titled. The article does not explore the reasons why men who hate women (or any other people who hate women) become informants, or make better informants than ordinary members of 'the left.' Instead, the article attempts to establish -without much substantiation – that the men and women who hate women make better Agents Provacateurs. These are two very different characters. (informants actively and knowingly work with the State for money or ideological reasons, Agents Provocateurs destroy movements 'from within' without explicit contact with the State's identifiable agents and often in direct service to their own position or benefit.) OK, so I quibble… but I do so from the other side of the mirror Alice spoke of… and it is easy to dismiss the difference if you don't want to actually cure the diseases which cause this. From the comments I read, most of the readers are happy with their own roles in challenging patriarchy. I am skeptical that this article does any such thing.

I have had plenty of experience with men and women who hate feminine gender roles and their assumed attributes, and who thrive on group conflict or otherwise serve their egos through "the work" of social justice. The most common phrase such a person might speak of when addressing mysogyny or gender hatred would be "accountability."

The term is used in this article to denote what we need, but it is not defined even by reference. The term means, literally, "what's your story?" Or put another way, to demand accountability is to demand from someone an account of how and why they thought that their actions were viable, appropriate or moral. Too often the part where facts are found and an account is demanded from the accused is totally absent from our collective efforts. Too often we do not confront misbehavior by ANYONE in our movements, especially when that person claims special status or identity. The author nods to this reality when she quotes activists who mutter "it's complicated" in response to some abuse "everyone knew" was going on. How did they know what they "know?"

Brandon Darby made his account. He posted on why he did what he did, and he makes a great case for the author's assertions. He's a poster boy for mysogyny becoming the direct agent of the State. But he's only one example, and not really typical of informants or agents in our movements. But his role for the author is served best because of his race and his gender and his self-admitted status as a confirmed agent of the state. He's easy to label, easier to hate for all the wrong reasons.

Informants in our movements are usually sent by an agency (I say this based on my personal investigations and reading of historical accounts) and Agents Provacatuers are usually self-nominated and misguided individualists (Same source). Whether you blame the state for the appearance of the latter, you can only blame our movement's incohesion and inability to deal openly with internal conflict for their continued existence in the roles which serve to divide us.

Unless and until men (especially white men) are held accountable and actually challenged by persons in the movement in an open manner, this problem will continue to fester. What happens instead is the soft approach; the telltale abuse survivor adaptation of slander, often anonymously posted or subversively communicated.

Oh, sure it is an effective way to get at the real bastards and undercut their authority. But it is also a great way to play on the fears, ideals, and guilt of the left in general, and isolate the not-so-bastards. Because we each want so earnestly to be good allies, we tend to adopt the "believe the victim" maxim. And that is a great thing to offer when it is time to listen in private to someone who needs to tell their story. But it is a toxic thing to turn around and repeat that story as if you "know" it to be true. It is especially toxic to turn that "knowledge" of only one side of the story into action in the community. Often that action is only symbolic, sometimes it is violence. Would any of us tolerate a state trial which muzzled the defense attorney? We sure would – if the accused were a white male who pisses us off in a meeting!

We hold governments to be acocuntable through an open medium, and expect debate and counter argument. But too often we throw this out when we hear rumors of bad behavior by the guy who pisses us off in a meeting. We expect the government or corporations to come clean with an account of what they are doing, and yet almost never actually do that hard work when it comes time to find out whether someone who was accused really is that bastard their former partner says they were.

Abuse is real, and it needs to be challenged wherever we find it. But too often, we really want validation and not a harder search for the truth – and we are too easily swayed by anyone who tells us we're special, that our own bad behavior really isn't as bad, or bad enough, to be addressed. Isn't that what the mysogynists say? It sure is. The most disgusting thing I ever heard a mysogynist say was that she was not responsible for her abuse because of her gender.

I am a man, and I have made mistakes for which I will always mourn. But I am a man, and not a role or an 'archy,' and I will always demand of my community that it speak truth to power even if that power is me.

Nothing about me, without me.

REPLY JULY 29, 2010 AT 8:55 PM

- RoyaleBlue says:

  You mean to say that you got dumped and now you're bitter at this guy because he spoke too loud at activist meetings? Grow up! Women cheat too. Thinking that your vagina is a wound that won't heal is misandrist and reeks of female privilege. If you're really interested in equality, try addressing the last frontier of civil rights and a plainly open form of sexism i.e. womens legal and social monopoly on abortion, perpetuated by referring to abortion as a "women's right". This gender construct denies men the most basic of human rights: the ability to have conscious control of their reproductive DNA. To say nothing of using sex appeal to manipulate this guy in the first place.

  REPLY JULY 30, 2010 AT 7:00 AM

  - Drew Hendricks says:

    No, I don't mean to say that anyone dumped me. BTW, I am a guy… and happily partnered, and not bitter about my relationship. My vag is not a wound, since I don't happen to own one… and I am not interested in 'equality' I am interested in liberation. Equality under the law, sure. BTW, men can take a whole lot of control of their reproductive choices from condoms (ugh) to female condoms (woot!) to vasectomy (…) to negotiating alternate forms of contact (bj?). I think someone's nap time got interrupted. I ain't the one in this conversation who needs to grow up, you're the one who needs to check his reading comprehension. When do you take responsibility for your desires? If socks or shoes turn you on, is it their fault, too?

    JULY 30, 2010 AT 9:57 AM

  - RoyaleBlue says:

    Condoms, female condoms, vasectomies, HJs, BJs, RJs, ?Js are all fine and dandy, but if an abortion were denied to a women for legal reasons, I doubt you would say, " Oh well, you should have used birth control/condoms/insert-any-birth-control". But you did for men. Massive double standard.

    JULY 30, 2010 AT 11:33 AM

  - Drew Hendricks says:

    "Condoms, female condoms, vasectomies, HJs, BJs, RJs, ?Js are all fine and dandy, but if an abortion were denied to a women for legal reasons, I doubt you would say, " Oh well, you should have used birth control/condoms/insert-any-birth-control". But you did for men. Massive double standard."

    Ha! The main difference is biology: A woman's right to decide is ultimately hers due to the womb's geography, and her ownership of that geography. The man's right to decide ends with his contribution to the pregnancy, thus the choices appropriate to his contribution were mentioned. This is not a double standard, it's a simple recognition of the vastly different roles men and women play in reproduction. Are you suggesting that since you made a woman pregnant, you get to veto her abortion? Or that since you got a woman pregnant, you get to decide that she will have an abortion? If so, how do you defend that?

    Of course I would advise women to take responsibility for avoiding abortions, they suck and they are expensive besides… but legally denying one is a hypothetical, and you're not making much sense given the topic of the piece is about abusive people being informants for the State.

    JULY 30, 2010 AT 4:11 PM

  - cjc says:

Isn't this post supposed to be censored? I thought sexist, homophobic, racist posts were censored? Maybe just racist and homophobic right? I mean – personally, I think the beginning of the post – saying that women think of their vagina as a wound – to already start off as sexist but to then go on about abortion – it just should be censored. This is the point. This stuff is so often ignored and just accepted. Women are told to just tolerate it and get used to it.

I have one other thing to point out – and again find no point arguing over abortion with those who never had one or will never have to have one – is this issue with domination in the first place. One problem with much of these organizing efforts is they are so focused on leadership which I think goes against the whole idea of what anarchist movements should be. As a woman, I have a real problem with male domination because it often comes with a complete disregard for my needs and desires and more than that has been very harmful to me in the past.

AUGUST 29, 2010 AT 9:05 AM

- RoyaleBlue says:

The physical aspect of pregnancy and abortion is insignificant to the emotional and spiritual aspect of it. By hiding behind female privilege vis-a-vis reproductive rights you do a massive disservice to both men and women. If you use the excuse that just because women carry the fetus physically that they therefore should have a monopoly on reproductive choice, you only feed into the commonly excepted female/mother paradigm of male oppression. Men are capable of feeling all the emotional ramification associated with reproductive rights equally as much as women. Did you ever think that men seek equal abortion rights for the same reason that women do; that they might want to become a parent on their schedule, when they are ready; that they take their patent on life, their DNA, there reproductive rights, very seriously. It's the most basic of human rights, and hiding behind womens biological female privilege is deeply hurtful. Reproduction is so much more than just pregnancy.

The furtherance and acceptance of this kind of oppression reinforces centuries old gender roles, e.g. men are a called "deadbeat dads" for abandoning a child they didn't want, but so-called progressives would never attack a women for abandoning a child by having an abortion. If you believe that pro-choice = pro-child, then we need to abandon legal and social norms which divorce men from their right to carefully make one of life's most important choices. This leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy and vicious cycle of low expectations.

Also, I know this is a new concept to you, and many people have a hard time wrapping their head around it initially, but I'm NOT saying that men should have veto power on womens abortion rights (although I know men who have been emotionally devastated by women aborting a fetus that they badly wanted). But I am saying that men's abortion rights should be equal to womens. If you are disturbed by the idea of men forcing women to have abortions, it should be easy to understand that the reverse is the current social and legal paradigm of oppression.

REPLY JULY 31, 2010 AT 3:58 PM

- Drew Hendricks says:

Nothing that you have written has anything to do with the issues raised by the article, and little of what you have written speaks to the concerns in my commentary upon that article. You do make some great examples of mysogynist rhetoric (Vagina is a wound??), and you apparently love to draw false equivalences. Of course men can feel bad that their child would be aborted by a partner, and of course men can feel bad that a pregnancy they did not intend to cause will be carried to term. But those feelings, you seem to argue, have primacy and precedence over what the woman's decision is, to have physical control over her own body. If somehow a man could take the physical responsibility for bringing his child to term, your argument could have merit. Perhaps with surgery and some intense medical support that is possible. But it's so far from reality as to close the door for meaningful discussion in this forum. I suggest you speak with the women in your life who have disappointed you, rather than distort what this article and its commenters are actually discussing. I am done being your rhetorical punching bag in this forum.

JULY 31, 2010 AT 4:33 PM

- Sappho says:

I agree that men have an equal right to get an abortion. Any pregnant man should have control over his body.

DECEMBER 20, 2010 AT 10:42 AM

29. Pingback: Links of Great Interest: "You know what my kids don't like? Being black in 1964." | The Hathor Legacy
30. Pingback: hegans, listen up! – Schlongs4Seals
31. Pingback: two great reads on movement building and dealing with destructive dynamics « strength never power
32. melinda says:

thank you. this was desperately needed!

REPLY AUGUST 3, 2010 AT 8:56 PM

33. Pingback: FIA » why misogynists make great informants…
34. kali13 says:

thank you.

REPLY AUGUST 4, 2010 AT 9:51 AM

35. H Rey says:

overall this is a very good article regarding the difficult issue of how to deal with sexism in organizing spaces. Sexism, homophobia and misogyny definitely need to be dealt with in our organizations, but doing this alone doesn't mean that we will weed out infiltrators and snitches for the state. Im sure there are other articles on security tactics and security culture for organizing spaces.

This article also raised other questions for me regarding sexual behaviour and the purpose of organizing spaces. What I mean by this is the author in this article presents organizing spaces as 'communities'. Should organizations strive to be such things, or does this also reflect a problem with how organizing is taking places (that is people in part looking to create a social space for themselves)? How do you work to ensure that radical organizations do not become inwardly focused and detached from the people we are trying to organize with?

Moreover, in reading the account of the 30 year old organizer, his misogyny comes through in his manipulation of women in those spaces. In this case, because its a straight male he is utilizing his privilege. However can't it also hold true in many cases that liberal attitudes towards sexual relations within organizations can damage organizing dynamics?

Again, just reflections I had from my experiences organizing after having read the article.

REPLY AUGUST 4, 2010 AT 11:43 PM

36. Aurora Levins Morales says:

Halleluyah! I became an activist in my own right as a teen in the late 60s/early 70s and experiences mountains of this kind of crap in every movement I was part of that included men–sexual predation and violence, militaristic hyper-masculinity, the dismissal of women's complaints as distractions from the "real work," domineering and patronizing behavior, how often the real work was done by women while men got limelight and took credit. In the anti-war movement, in support work for the Panthers, in the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, in the Latin America solidarity movement, horrifying levels of misogynist, violent, destructive behavior were tolerated and even admired. By the time I was in my mid-twenties and working in the Chile solidarity movement, I was in fact able to stand up to some of the behavior. Others remember this better than I do. I remember rage and humiliation, but I'm told I called men out for their sexism on a regular basis, and I know I blew the whistle on men who were screwing around with lots of women. One of the dynamics of that movement was that it was largely made up of Latin American men and white women many of them new to activism–and the men were designated revolutionaries while the women were allies. It was nearly impossible for white women to call the men on the sexism and not get trashed for imperialist attitudes. As a Puerto Rican woman with long political experience, and a leftist vocabulary as good as any pseudo-Che's, I was in a better position to take it on, but I did so largely unsupported and took a lot of hits. The final straw was my encounter with a visiting Chilean man with whom I connected deeply, but would not sleep with because he was married. We corresponded for months. I wrote articles for an underground Chilean magazine, wrote to him about politics and poetry and history. He wrote love letters telling me he was getting a divorce and that I was the "women of the future" and true comrade he wanted to be with. He came to the states on tour–he was a musician– and I agreed to be his interpreter. When I arrived in New York a few days before him, I found out that a) he was writing identical letters to women in five different cities, b) he would be accompanied on his tour by his long time lover. I told his lover, and we confronted him. He said it hurt him more than it hurt me, that personal feelings shouldn't be allowed to get in the way of the work, and I had a revolutionary duty to complete the tour. I did do the tour, and having lost interest in him, even enjoyed it, but it was the same month that This Bridge Called My Back, to which I was a contributor, came out, and I had better places to be. I had been part of a group that did political performance art, with a central role as a writer and one of the people in charge of political education. Right at the same time as these events, there was a kind of coup in that group– several of the men returned to Chile and "it was decided" that myself and the other women should do support work for a music ensemble–coffee, xeroxing… I left and have done only minimal political work with men since then. I did write the Chilean man a letter, which I recently unearthed a copy of, laying out clearly the political consequences of his kind of behavior to our movements–and your article inspires me to include it, with some context, in the essay collection I'm working on. A shorter and more poetic version was published in my book Getting Home Alive, as "Letter to a Compañero." Thank you from my heart for this writing. We have all been so heavily hurt by this– by the immediate personal impact of the violence, disrespect and dismissal, by the way it erodes our hopefulness, enthusiasm and capacity for social justice work, and by the harm it has done to our movements and therefore to the possibility of a much, much better world.

REPLY AUGUST 18, 2010 AT 11:27 AM

37. Pingback: important article from make/shift magazine, linked on Incite!'s blog | speaking towards peace
38. Pingback: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants « The Boggs Blog
39. Ming says:

Regarding one quote from the article: "I am more surprised at my meek, diplomatic responses—like an abuse survivor—as I attempted to placate compañeros who saw nothing wrong with yelling at their partners, friends, and other organizers."

Do abuse survivors always give meek, diplomatic responses to their oppressors? Even if they do, can they be blamed for this behavior?

I'm really irritated at the characterization of abuse survivors as meek and diplomatic in this otherwise illuminating article. Come on, do better!

REPLY JANUARY 6, 2011 AT 2:59 PM

- Sappho says:

  An abuse victim might respond meekly to avoid further abuse. An abuse survivor, someone who is recovering from abuse, would hopefully be in touch with her rage and respond with appropriate anger. It took a lot of work for me to get in touch with my anger at being molested. Now that rage fuels my work for peace and social justice.

  REPLY JANUARY 6, 2011 AT 10:09 PM

40. swaneagle harijan says:

This is one of the most important pieces i have come across in a long, long time that i pass on to all serious male activists i meet. I wish to write about this further myself as it is a serious, ongoing problem. Lip service is simply that in addressing the continuous domineering white male voice, action, oppression and those who support that voice or replicate it. Discouraging is my current position on the state of radical activism.

REPLY MARCH 6, 2011 AT 12:35 PM

41. Pingback: In Search of a Better Way « Ready for Change
42. Pingback: furkid friday: dogs and books (and books about dogs) » V for Vegan: easyVegan.info
43. Marco says:

What an amazing article. Thanks so much for sharing it! I really appreciate the positive suggestions about how we can challenge these things within our own movements. How many people have left movements because they've had to battle against internal racism, transphobia, misogyny and homophobia amongst supposed progressives? I know of so many collectives here in Australia that have been torn apart by this. And then when the victim speaks out, they often find themselves unsupported or not listened to. I personally don't get involved in many things in my city anymore because of having my anti-racist perspective and experiences of racism as a POC constantly dismissed or marginalised by white men. So what do we need to do? In 2009, during one squat occupation, I suggested a "grievance resolution collective" – an affinity group of people dedicated to mediating conflicts like this. Providing immediate support for people calling out internal oppression within activist circles, but also mediating between parties, so that all sides are heard. It would also have dedicated itself to the study of multiple oppressions and practical conflict resolution techniques, non-violent communication, etc… I think this suggestion got taken up in a Climate Camp organising collective at a later stage, but it wasn't enough to stop one woman leaving because of sexism, and one man of colour leaving because of racism.. So this article has made me think about all this stuff again. And has also made me check my own internalised patriarchal behaviours.. which I'm still working on. Everytime I raise my voice at my partner I hate myself for it, and think what a hypocrite I am. And I know I have been unwittingly sexist in the context of some activist initiatives too, and I haven't always been the best in responding to those who call me out on it. But I'm aware of these things and trying to work thru them. And beyond just getting angry about the Left as it is right now for the pervasiveness of hypocrites who proclaim one thing but then perpetuate oppression in their behaviours, I'm thinking it's time to do something really practical and meaningful. Specifically, I'm thinking again about a "grievance resolution" affinity group of the kind I mentioned earlier, dedicated to working thru conflicts that arise in activist groups and networks around internal sexism, transphobia, homophobia, racism, etc. This really resonated with me from the article: "Third, we must develop a model for collective accountability that truly treats the personal as political and helps us to begin practicing justice in our communities." And the idea of a dedicated affinity group that would be on call to help groups and individuals work thru issues might be one such model. It would a) help to prevent people leaving movements and becoming jaded; b) facilitate collective learning in the Left; c) help our movements become stronger so that they don't self-destruct.. Importantly, the kinds of changes any such initiative would seek to make in the Left would not at all be separate from the kinds of changes the Left seeks to make in wider society.. The former is no less important than the latter, since we really have to prefigure the world we wish to create in our own collectives. Having said all that, and having had that flash of inspiration after reading that article… I am in the middle of hardcore thesis-writing, and wouldn't have much time to dedicate to it right now. And I'm also super-isolated where I am right now, in terms of allies. But if any off you have time/energy and think this idea is worthwhile and worth pursuing, feel free to take it up as an idea.. In the meantime, let's share resources and references about multiple oppressions, intersectionality, conflict resolution, our experiences of oppression within the Left, and so on. Let's continue to grow this conversation! Peace, Marco

REPLY JUNE 19, 2011 AT 4:18 AM

44. Coxblokedbetamale says:

Misogyny does not exist without Misandrony and vice versa. And homophobia cannot exist without heterophobia. Finger point all you want about how you think you're the only one who suffers, and you think you're the only victim, and that you have an inferior amount of privilages and you will go nowhere. What strikes volumes and raises suspicion is the naivity and stockholm syndrome of women who flock to the c*x of these so called "alpha" a-holes, and expect the men who you don't find as sexually attractive to give you a shred of sympathy.

REPLY JULY 30, 2011 AT 3:28 PM

- Coxblokedbetamale says:

  Anna Mae Aquash should be given an honorable mention of the kind of victimized woman and a story that suits this article. Robert Robideau named a lot of AIM people as responsible for her death.

REPLY JULY 30, 2011 AT 3:33 PM

45. Pingback: Violence | PrernaLal.com
46. FM says:

I find your following statement EQUALLY irresponsible:

"… someone who creates chaos wherever he goes is either an informant or an irresponsible, unaccountable time bomb who can be unintentionally as effective at undermining social-justice organizing as an informant. Ultimately they both do the work of the state and need to be held accountable."

I am a woman and like many other women I know, I have been often attacked, abused, marginalized in movts and orgs. As well as sexually harassed at one of the very reputable orgs u mention in this very same article. However, when I spoke up I was treated in the same manner as which you judge those who "creates chaos". This is such a HYPOCRITICAL position to take since standing up within a movt to injustices being committed within the movt by ppl in the movt is ALSO "creating chaos". HOWEVER, it is not the victims responsibility, by making such irresponsible accusations, you are further enabling "Gender Violence" in radical movts. I have witnessed this type of horrible treatment towards other women who speak up as well.

REPLY AUGUST 8, 2011 AT 3:59 PM

47. Pingback: An Open Letter to Sheela Haran and Capital FM 88.9 | Kakak Killjoy
48. Pingback: On the Politics of Sex and Other Things | Ctrl + O
49. Pingback: Now What? | The Fibrochondriac
50. Russ D (@Russdaren) says:

"Gender violence has historically been deeply entrenched in the political practices of the Left and constituted one of the greatest (if largely unacknowledged) threats to the survival of these organizations."
I disagree with the first premise of this statement. However I agree wholeheartedly with the second. I do not think misogyny is "entrenched" in the left so much as it is entrenched in society. It can not be blamed on a bourgeois upbringing or coming from a lower class background. It is an inability to self examine and be receptive to constructive criticism. I would also like to add that not all males are sexist or queer phobic. So let's refrain from tactics that throw the baby out with the bathwater. Call out the guy who has issues with women. dont call him out just for being a guy.
As I recently witnessed at an Occupy meeting a young woman and a young queer man (both white BTW) couldn't stop yelling at each other about who was more marginalized!
The 1% loves that kind of consciousness raising.

REPLY JANUARY 10, 2012 AT 12:56 PM

51. Heidi Sinclair says:

… this is not so relevant to the issue of informants but more to the issue of being supportive and respectful to women and keeping them involved – an issue of "benign neglect" I guess: need more support for moms – such as tolerance for kids at meetings or activities for kids or childcare provided for meetings or actions … notice the missing "mom" age group in most radical/political organizing activities?

REPLY JANUARY 11, 2012 AT 7:21 PM

52. Anna says:

Well written. This is exactly why I left the wank-fest that was Occupy Santa Rosa. Exactly.

REPLY JANUARY 13, 2012 AT 9:19 PM

53. Pingback: How to recognize a police informer « D2 route
54. Jaime says:

Stopped reading at "wpmyn".

How is being feminist ok if being masculinist wrong?

"Male privilege" is an offensive oppressive term that you use to get what you want.

REPLY FEBRUARY 11, 2012 AT 8:22 PM

55. Pingback: incite! courtney morris. why misogynists make great informants. | My Life in Order
56. Sahila ChangeBringer says:

Hah… I must be doing something right… Someone calling himself Brandon Darby follows me on Twitter

REPLY MARCH 20, 2012 AT 10:40 AM

57. Mike B) says:

After gazing at my Red File, some of my Socialist Labor Party comrades in Michigan told me that there was a police informant in a seminar (at what was known then as the 'free university, a room in the MSU student union building) I was holding on Marx's "Value, Price and Profit". When I thought back on the experience, I remembered that this fellow could never remember what it was that I was talking about. You could ask him if he understood 'value' and opposed to 'price' and he'd come up blank yet, he took copious notes. The notes were about the others in the class, physical descriptions and speculations as to whether he or she were a possible suspect in a bombing as the Red Squad File revealed later. None of them were, of course. In fact the chief suspect was a mild mannered math major who went on to become a professor in New York.

Other police/government informants in the anti-war movement would generally be recognizable by virtue of the fact that they'd be the ones advocating the most absurd levels of violence e.g. standing on the top of the bank building and shooting down at the police. Of course, at the time, there were a few men and women of all skin colours and sexual orientations advocating violence who weren't agent provocateurs.

So, just assume that your group has police agents in it, if you're doing anything effective against the legalised power of the State to prosecute wars, execute people or any of a number of struggles over who should control the collective product of labour. Once you've found the agent by asking penetrating political questions or by his (or even her) behaviour in attempting to assert political power over others or provoke others into illegal acts, best just to keep them busy doing things which need doing like distributing papers etc. I find that knowledge is key. if the individual in question doesn't know what the group's real aims are that's usually a dead giveaway. And, while it is true that most cops are conservative, misogynist, homophobes, it's not true that all people who are so afflicted are cops.

My aims as a social revolutionary is to change the mode of production from wage-labour to production for use and need on the basis of socially necessary labour time. Common ownership of the collective product of labour is also on my agenda. However, I always keep in mind that these goals cannot be achieved without the everyday praxis of equal political power amongst all men and women.

REPLY MARCH 26, 2012 AT 12:54 AM

58. Pingback: Chasing Boars, Seeing Red | approximately 8,000 words - Kit O'Connell's Homepage
59. Pingback: Confronting Personal and State Violence Simultaneously « Muslim Reverie
60. Pingback: Prisons and Struggles Against Capitalism | go it alone (together)
61. Boyd Sepulveda says:

Very well written post. It will be beneficial to everyone who utilizes it, including me. Keep doing what you are doing – i will definitely read more posts.

REPLY MAY 20, 2012 AT 1:51 AM

62. anonymous says:

too bad this article barely even mentions trans people

REPLY JULY 16, 2012 AT 11:35 AM

63. Pingback: When Men on the Left Refuse to See Their Sexism « Muslim Reverie
64. Pingback: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements | Education for All | Scoop.it
65. Pingback: Interview with Elise Hendrick on Liberal Naivete and Entryism. « The (Dis)Loyal Opposition to Modernity:
66. Pingback: Patriarchy & The Movement: A West Coast Discussion | Beyond the Barricades
67. schei says:

"When we allow women/queer organizers to leave activist spaces and protect people whose violence provoked their departure, we are saying we value these de facto state agents who disrupt the work more than we value people whose labor builds and sustains movements." !!!

REPLY MARCH 17, 2013 AT 4:37 PM

68. Pingback: Building a movement to confront abuse in our movement | leneghancaroline
69. individual says:

"Time and again heterosexual men in radical movements have been allowed to assert their privilege and subordinate others. "

key phrase: "have been allowed to…"

don't like it? DON'T ALLOW IT!!!!

don't accept the oppression of another, especially when you would undoubtedly have the support and solidarity of many others in your "radical movement". stop playing and encouraging the ideology of victimization, take control of your own life and encourage others to do the same.

which also means taking responsibility for your own behavior, which sounds like it includes consciously playing the victim.

REPLY APRIL 8, 2013 AT 11:31 AM

70. Pingback: An Open Letter to Sheela Haran and Capital FM 88.9 | Keluarga Killjoy
71. Pingback: Here's where "Maymay is a stalker" probably comes from « Maybe Maimed but Never Harmed
72. Daisy Deadhead (@DaisyDeadhead) says:

Two comments eaten… can at least one of them be retrieved?

REPLY JULY 23, 2013 AT 7:00 AM

73. Pingback: Not so good at the whole "boundaries" thing. | Soggy in Milk
74. Pingback: C. Derick Varn Interviews Me on the Malaise of the US Left by Élise Hendrick | The Anti-Vulgar Autonomy Logs
75. Pingback: Godwin's law is totally as bad as Hitler (not) | Some anarchist reviews of stuff
76. Pingback: "It's Not the Saints Who Can Bring Us the Sinners": Sex Offender Outed as $90,000 Snitch in Pacific Northwest Activist Scene | Earth First! Newswire
77. Dental implants Poland says:

When some one searches for his necessary thing, thus he/she needs to be available that in detail, so that thing is maintained over here.

REPLY SEPTEMBER 11, 2013 AT 5:58 AM

78. Pingback: Discussion Materials for 18th of September 2013 | If We Can't Dance
79. Pingback: How We Struggle | PDX IWW PRC
80. Pingback: PDX IWW PRC
81. oogenhand says:

Reblogged this on oogenhand and commented:
PRIVILEGE IS NOT UNIFORM: Remember this people, the most important remark in the whole article.

REPLY DECEMBER 17, 2013 AT 8:04 AM

82. Pingback: Men Are Sucking the Life out of the Left | Reading Without Men
83. Pingback: Reflections on Truth and Revolution: A History of Sojourner Truth Organization 1969-1986 | werehirwerequeer
84. Pingback: Men Are Sucking the Life out of the Left | Occupy Wall Street by Platlee
85. Gregory A. Butler (@GREGORYABUTLER) says:

There's a lot of good stuff about sexism and upper class elitism in the left in this article.

It's unfortunate that it was wrapped up in a discussion about police informants

One thing I've found in my years on the left is that a LOT of us like to blame our failures and the failures of our organizations on "the FBI" or "police informants"

I've also seen lots of people demonize people they dislike/disagree with by saying that they are "FBI agents" or "informants"

I've also seen lots of folks become paranoid, wildly overestimate the capacity of the government to infiltrate the left (they aren't nearly as omnipotent as a lot of us like to think) and adopt paranoid "security culture" that alienates ordinary people who might be inclined to join us

Using inflammatory snitch jacketing language like "inadvertent agents of the state" is very dangerous – in the days of the Black Panthers, two Panthers actually got murdered BY OTHER PANTHERS based on false accusations of being "agents of the state"

This article would have been much better if the OP had simply said MISOGYNY AND ELITISM ON THE LEFT ARE BAD AND HURT OUR POLITICAL WORK without having to bring the whole police question into it

REPLY AUGUST 28, 2014 AT 7:13 AM

86. Pingback: Interview with Elise Hendrick on Liberal Naivete and Entryism. | Symptomatic Commentary
87. aboriginalpress says:

Reblogged this on .

REPLY OCTOBER 3, 2014 AT 1:02 PM

88. Julia says:

I just want to thank you for writing this 4 years ago! Its like water to my parched mouth right now. I am a white woman who has ostensibly left the left because of its misogyny. The worst offenders are obviously white males with their own agenda. Their newest tactic is pitting white feminists against feminists of color. A worthy topic but certainly doesn't come across as authentic when coming from a white-male, "progressives" misogynists trying to divide us so they can retain their superiority in our communities.

REPLY OCTOBER 7, 2014 AT 7:52 PM

89. Regina Rodriguez (@7Regina7) says:

Informative and well written article, thank you. My only critique would be that at times the author is a little "soft" in addressing misogyny, but this is how our culture (black, white , hispanic or whatever culture) tends to be in general. This one sentence for example : "Our strategies don't have to be punitive; people are entitled to their mistakes. But we should expect that people will own those actions and not allow them to become a pattern." I doubt a "left wing social justice" movement supporter would take that attitude if we are talking about "police brutality against black men" or discussing any other social justice issue where under privileged people or an ethnicity or race are systematically oppressed and exploited and even violently attacked. But if the violent and/or psychological oppression (in this case within a "left" movement) is referring to the women only, those things are considered "mistakes" rather than acts of violence and/or oppression and inequality" and the sentence carefully started with "let's not be too punitive" (because "boys will be boys" and we are not addressing a political or racist subject but "only" misogyny. And the main concern is not what is happening to the women (primarily, men can be victims of sexism too of course) but the main concern appears to be about how this "might effect those left organizations in terms of creating police informants etc, , . What some of these men did to these women as described in the article is nothing short of demanding justice. If these men demand justice from society while dishing out their own injustice and violence towards women within their movement, they are no more than hypocrites . For example, they might be working to expose and fight against "white privilege" but are unwilling to give up their "male privilege" but use it for their personal advantage. Half of humanity are women. I agree with Gregory Butler : " This article would have been much better if the OP

had simply said MISOGYNY AND ELITISM ON THE LEFT ARE BAD AND HURT OUR POLITICAL WORK without having to bring the whole police question into it ” Nor should misogyny on such a horrific scale be considered “mistakes” .

REPLY JANUARY 13, 2015 AT 12:16 PM

90. Pingback: Organizing Against Patriarchy » CounterPunch: Tells the Facts, Names the Names
91. Pingback: Freedom of Disassociation: Regarding Brad Spangler - Freedom's Floodgates
92. Pingback: Five Feet of Fury – Kathy Shaidle – Wimps: ‘Feminist writers are so besieged by online abuse that some have begun to retire’
93. Pingback: Libertad de desvinculación: Acerca de Brad Spangler | Freedom's Floodgates
94. Pingback: Undercover, The True Story of Britain’s Secret Police | Nieuwsblog Buro Jansen & Jansen
95. Pingback: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements | Nieuwsblog Buro Jansen & Jansen
96. uaptsd says:

Reblogged this on United Against Police Terror – San Diego.

REPLY MARCH 31, 2015 AT 3:20 PM

97. Pingback: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements | Nieuwsblog Buro Jansen & Jansen
98. Pingback: | Nieuwsblog Buro Jansen & Jansen
99. Pingback: ‘The Black Panthers’ From a Very Male Viewpoint | Bitch Flicks
00. Pingback: No Safehouses: Patriarchy on the Left Part 2 of 4 | werehirwerequeer
01. Pingback: The work of solidarity and healing | skycroeser.net
02. Pingback: Insurgent Practice and the Black Panther Party: an Interview with Joshua Bloom | Moorbey'z Blog
03. Pingback: No Safehouses: Patriarchy on the Left Part 2 of 4 – Unity and Struggle
04. Pingback: We Will Not Integrate into a Burning House: Polemic on Bad Gender Practice in the Liaison Committee for a New Communist Party (NCP-LC) – redguardsaustin
05. Pingback: Red Guards Austin: A Year Summation of the Life of a Militant Maoist Organization in the U.S. Central South – Red Guards Austin
06. Pingback: Learning to Fight, Learning to Heal – Unity and Struggle
07. Pingback: Repost: Learning to Fight, Learning to Heal – werehirwerequeer
08. Pingback: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements | United Against Police Terror – San Diego
09. Pingback: He said, they said – hypatia dot ca
10. Pingback: Strategy After Ferguson
11. Pingback: Interesting Link Archive (Vol.1) – ablackunbound
12. Pingback: No Safehouses: Patriarchy on the Left Part 2 of 4 – werehirwerequeer
13. Pingback: 71 Days to Prepare Before the First Executive Orders - The Libertarian Institute
14. Pingback: Moving Forward... - Abolish Work
15. Pingback: To Be Unified, We Have to Learn How to Build Unity – sonaorillasdelrio
16. Pingback: The Hammer in our Hamlets: Patriarchy on the Left Part 3 o | Unity and Struggle
17. Pingback: The Hammer in Our Hamlets: Patriarchy on the Left Part 3 of 4 – werehirwerequeer
18. Pingback: oh crap it’s today: a resource list | open-source mind
19. Pingback: Pre-Reading for 2017 IWW Skill Share: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements – Greater Kansas City IWW
20. Pingback: Lessons From the Anti-Austerity Movement – Jacobin Dev
21. Pingback: Misoginia, Peste Emocional e Infiltração – MONOGNE
22. Pingback: Occupy ICE Portland: Lessons from the Barricades : Another Perspective – Anarch.Info
23. Pingback: CrimethInc: #OccupyICE #Portland: Lessons from the Barricades Another Perspective – Enough is Enough!
24. Pingback: Occupy ICE Portland: Lessons from the Barricades – PUGET SOUND ANARCHISTS
25. Pingback: Occupy ICE Portland: Lessons from the Barricades : Another Perspective - Antifa Today

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